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SUBJECT: GOSS REGIONAL AFFAIRS UNDERSCRETARY ON SPLM POLITITICAL
DYNAMICS, CHINA, AND THE SUDAN CONSORTIUM

REF: STATE 41697

¶1. (SBU) Summary. In a wide ranging conversation April 25, the Undersecretary of the GoSS Ministry of Regional Cooperation said that the Council of Minister's vote to delay the census in the South reflected South Sudan's internal ethnic anxieties, that it is unclear whether President Kiir will run for President of Sudan in 2009, and that China is interested in strengthening its presence in the South, but that his Ministry lacks the resources to engage right now. The GoSS hopes that the U.S. will send a political-level representative to next month's Sudan Consortium to signal that Sudan remains a high U.S. priority. End summary.

President Kiir and the Census

¶2. (SBU) On April 25, Juba ConOffs met with Ministry of Regional Cooperation (the defacto GoSS Foreign Ministry) Undersecretary and SPLM insider Cirino Hiteng Ofuho. Cirino noted that he had just returned from his home village in Eastern Equatoria state, where he had gone with his family to be counted in the census. CG Datta asked Cirino's view on what was behind the recent vote of the GoSS Council of Ministers (later reversed) to significantly delay the census in the South. Was it a revolt against the authority of President Kiir, who had endorsed holding the census as scheduled?

¶3. (SBU) Cirino thought that the opposition was more a reflection of the dynamics of South Sudan's ethnic/tribal anxieties. He said that many of South Sudan's tribes fear that the census will indicate that they are less numerous than they would like to believe compared to other ethnic groups in the South. There is a fear, he said, of being shown to be a minority by an undercount (or accurate count) and thus become vulnerable. In the Council, the Ministers had cast their votes based on the perceived interest of their native tribes. The Council's vote on the census was not a reflection on Kiir's authority. Kiir remains strong and secure as leader of the SPLM, he said.

Will Kiir Run for President of Sudan?

¶4. (SBU) Asked whether he thinks it likely that Kiir will run for President of Sudan in the 2009 elections, Cirino responded that it is a difficult issue. Many in the SPLM think there is no point in Kiir running, since Southerners are likely to vote for independence from the North in the 2011 referendum anyway. There is growing disenchantment among GoSS/SPLM leadership with CPA implementation. The NCP is not making unity very attractive. Much will depend on what happens at the SPLM convention in May.

¶5. (SBU) CG Datta noted that the people of the South seem to be giving up on the CPA, but observed that it is too early to do so. Cirino agreed that the SPLM needs to develop a national policy for all of Sudan, not just for the South, for the 2009 elections. He said that South Sudan Legislative Assembly Speaker Wani Igga had

just returned from a tour of the North impressed with the level of potential support there for the SPLM.

Rising Crime in Juba

16. (SBU) CG shared a draft letter from the international community in Juba, expressing concern at the recent rise in violent crime. NGOs in particular have been targets of robberies, because they must hold large amounts of cash on hand due to the lack of banking services in South Sudan. Many are feeling increasingly vulnerable and are starting to move out of Juba. Cirino noted that the Council of Ministers is seized with the issue and took up the problem on April 21.

China in South Sudan

17. (SBU) CG asked about South Sudan's relations with China (reftel), noting President Kiir's summer of 2007 visit to Beijing and more recent newspaper reports. Cirino said that the Chinese have expressed an interest in strengthening political and economic ties with the South, but there has been little follow-up. Cirino blamed this on a lack of capacity in his own Ministry to adequately keep up with multiple issues. Instead, it is focusing its time and limited resources on developing relations with a few high-priority partners, e.g., immediate neighbors, the U.S. and the EU. Cirino agreed when CG Datta noted that many South Sudanese seem to view China with suspicion because of its close ties to the government in Khartoum.

Sudan Consortium

18. (SBU) Cirino asked about the level of U.S. participation at the May 5-7 Sudan Consortium in Oslo. The GoSS hopes for political-level attendance by the U.S. (the Secretary or Deputy

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Secretary), even if for just one day. Cirino said that this would

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demonstrate continued U.S. political support for Sudan and would greatly bolster GOSS President Kiir. The NCP, he said, would like to keep the Consortium meeting low-key and out of the headlines. U.S. political-level participation would send a strong signal that Sudan has not been forgotten.

19. (SBU) Comment: The GOSS, which did not exist three years ago, is stretched very thin and suffers in many respects from inexperience and a lack of capacity. There is an interest, as Cirino indicated, in engaging China, and a realization that doing so might help to pull China away from support for the NCP in the North, but by Cirino's own admission it is beyond their ability to engage further than they already have. They simply do not have the staff who are capable of handling all of the tasks they currently have before them. As for the Consortium meeting in Oslo, this is the second time the GoSS has appealed to the US to send a high level political delegation. It is true that Kiir's reputation and status in the South will be hurt if the US is thought not to have backed him up by helping him to engage the meeting on the issues of Darfur and the CPA, which he plans to raise. We urge high-level participation if at all possible; attendance by Special Envoy Williamson would send the right signal.

FERNANDEZ